

A Fawcett Publication

FAMOUS STAR OF THE
HOPALONG CASSIDY MOVIES

Bill Boyd

WESTERN

APR.

10¢

NO. 22



IN THIS ISSUE:
**THE FINGER
OF
SUSPICION!**

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repeating AIR RIFLE

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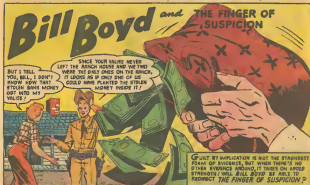


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W. A. Fawcett, Jr., President





BUT WHAT'S THIS? IS SOMEONE TRY-
ING TO ROB MARY DUE'S WALLET?
WHILE BILL BOYD IS TRYING TO RESCUE
A HIDE?



BUT IT'S NOT A ROBBERY! THE
MYSTERIOUS HAND IS PUTTING
MONEY INTO THE WALLET!



WOW!
THE GUNMAN
SAVED MY LIFE,
PRISONER!

HOW I GIVE
YOU A HIDE
BACK TO TOWN?



NO, THANKS! I LIVE
CLOSE BY!

WELL, I'D BETTER BE ON MY
WAY! LET'S GO, MARY DUE!



HE'S GOING! DID YOU
CARRY OUT YOUR PART
OF THE PLAN, CLINTON?



I SWEAR MR.
LAWFORD!

GOOD! NOW LET'S
GET OUR HORSES!
WE CAN'T LET THAT
HOMER OUT OF
OUR SIGHT NOW!



SHORTLY AFTER, AT THE LOCAL
SHERIFF'S OFFICE

TO DEPOSIT ALL OF MISS DUE'S WAL-
LETTER IN THE BANK. WAIT FOR HER,
BUT BEFORE YOU LEAVE, I'D LIKE
TO MAKE A LIST OF THEM SO THERE
WOULDN'T BE ANY MISTAKE!



WHY-
EVER, YOU SAY,
SHERIFF?

SAY, LOOK AT ALL
THOSE BILLS! I'D
BETTER COUNT IT!
DID YOU KNOW
SHE PUT MONEY
IN HERE?

NO! SHE WOULDN'T
MENTION ANYTHING
ABOUT CASH!



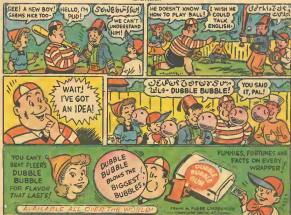














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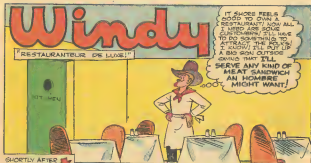
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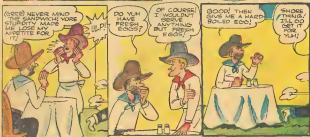
SHORTLY AFTER



A FEW MINUTES LATER --











BUT THIS STORM'S TOO BAD TO RIDE IN. CAN'T YOU FIND SOME WORK FOR ME? I JUST FINISHED A JOB AND I'M WILLING TO PAY EXTRA!



MONEY'S NOT THE OBJECT, SIR. WE JUST DON'T HAVE ANY EMPTY ROOMS! THAT IS—

—UNLESS YOU WANT TO SHARE A ROOM WITH ONE OF THE OTHER GUESTS!



I WOULDN'T OBJECT, BUT PERHAPS HE WOULD!

DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT! JACK HAWKS HAS TWO ROOMS AND HE WON'T MIND!



IN FACT, HE'S SUCH A SOUND SLEEPER, IF YOU LEAVE BEFORE HE GETS UP, HE'LL NEVER EVEN KNOW YOU WERE IN HERE!



WELL, IF YOU DON'T THINK HE'LL MIND, I'LL STOP RIGHT BY THE OTHER BED AND GET SOME SLEEP!

SLEEP TIGHT! I'LL WAKE YOU WHEN EARLY!



THE NEXT MORNING... OH, GOOD MORNING! I WAS JUST COMING TO WAKE YOU!



THANKS! I GOT UP A SHORT WHILE AGO! I'M JUST FINISHING DRESSING!

HEY! WHAT'S THAT? JACK HAWKS IS COVERED WITH BLOOD!



BLOOD??

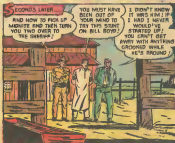
(GASP!) HE'S DEAD!

BUT HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE?









BILL BOYD WESTERN

HAMMER HEAD

SAD TIME



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OF WAR

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BATTLE STORIES

WAR! WAR! WAR! **NEW!** **WAR! WAR! WAR!**

30c WATCH FOR EACH ISSUE AT YOUR FAVORITE NEWSSTAND 30c

THE WOULD-BE SHERIFF



By Eando Binder

"**W**ERE right on his trail," said Sheriff Stone, leaning over his horse and squinting at the tracks on the ground. "I've been after Owlhoot Otis for months and this time I'm going to corner that sidewinder."

"Yeh, we'll get him!" echoed Randy Watson, twirling his gun.

Sheriff Stone turned to stare curiously at his companion. Randy Watson was a young, eager-faced cowpuncher who took this all as a thrilling adventure instead of a grim game with a desperado and death.

"Are you sure you want to come along with me?" the sheriff asked once more. "Owlhoot Otis is a killer. He's been looting and killing like a mad dog. When we catch up to him, he isn't going to smile sweetly and give up. He's going to fight like a wild animal. Maybe you'd better go home now and . . ."

"Save your breath, sheriff!" Randy interrupted. "I've got time off from the ranch right now. And I don't want to be a cowpuncher all my life. I want to be a sheriff someday, and I figure learning this business from you is the best training I could get."

Sheriff Stone hesitated, but he couldn't resist the appeal in the young cowpoke's face and voice. "Let's go," he said grimly. "Owlhoot Otis has a tired horse and we're gaining on him."

The trail was plain—too plain. Stone was puzzled about that. The cunning badman usually left very little, if any, trail. It wasn't long before they saw the horseman ahead, topping a rise far off.

"There's the coyote!" yelled Randy, raising himself in the saddle for a better look.

"Look out!" snapped Stone, pulling Randy by the arm just in time. A sharp report sounded and a bullet whined, taking off Randy's hat, spinning it to the dirt.

"See what I meant before?" Stone said quietly, to the white-faced young cowboy. "Owlhoot Otis is playing this game for keeps. Are you game to go on?"

"Sure," grinned Randy. "I'm learning I'll be a real good sheriff, with lessons from you. Let's corral that gunslick now."

Hard riding brought the two pursuers closer to the fleeing desperado. "He's caught in open country," gloated Randy. "No woods or hills ahead. Kind of dumb on his part."

"That's the funny thing," mused Stone, frowning. "He could have forked off into timberland before. Why didn't he? There's something loco about this whole thing . . ."

"Look!" yelled Randy, spurring his cayuse forward. "He's heading for that cave. We got him holed up. Yayyyyyy!"

"Wait!" Stone answered. "Now I get it. Stop, Randy!"

But it was too late. Randy couldn't hear, and he was racing for the cave mouth. Muttering, the sheriff could only follow. The mouth of the cave was big and they both galloped into the gloomy cavern. Almost immediately shots rang out from the shadows ahead.

"Off your horse!" Stone cried, at last making himself heard. "He's bushwhacking us!"

They flung themselves off their mounts, crouching in shadow. Randy's face was bewildered. "You mean he's ambushing us here?"

"Yeh, you young fool," Stone blessed back. "You led us right into his trap! Don't you see? Owlhoot Otis wanted to get me out of the way so he cooked up this wild goose chase, leaving a plain trail. Now the question is, how do we get out of here—alive?"

"Why, we can just run out," Randy said unthinkingly, jumping up. Bullets almost clipped him, but Stone yanked him back.

"How did you ever live this long?" Stone asked bitingly. "Don't you realize that anybody running out of the cave, with the strong light outlining him, gives Owlhoot a dead head? He had this all figured out in advance. He probably explored the cave before and knows it like a book. He can stalk us like animals . . ."

Even at the moment another shot rang out from the hide-outlaw, from another direction, hitting so close that chips of rock stung their faces.

And then wild laughter curdled their blood, echoing hollowly somewhere in the gloom beyond them. It was the mad, gloating laugh of

the killer himself. "Howdy, Sheriff Stone!" came his mocking voice. "Welcome to Crystal Cave. You walked into my trap like a baby. I got this cave mapped like my own backyard. I'll sneak up behind you in the dark, sooner or later, and shoot you down like a polecat. And the same with that rummy with you, whoever he is. Run, Sheriff! Run for your life! See if you can escape me!"

Another shot exploded in the shadows and again a bullet sang its song of death near them. Randy moaned in pain and tried to jump up, but Stone dragged him down firmly. "Back deeper into the cave," he whispered. "It's our only hope. Follow me. Don't make any noise."

But it was impossible not to make noise in the tomblike silence as they crawled between stalagmites of the huge cavern, with its crystalline stone formations glinting dully around them. Also bats were disturbed and twittered as they flew off. A dead giveaway to their movements.

But strangely, no further shots came from their deadly bushwhacker. Instead, his voice rang out mockingly again. "Hiding back there, ah? Good! You see, that's part of my plan too. I'm sneaking out to the open air. My next job is going to be robbing the express stage. And you won't stop me, Sheriff. Know why? Because you're going to die in this cave! You see, I've got the cave mouth all dynamited, ready to go off."

It was only a few moments later that the thundering blast flung Stone and Randy off their feet. Picking themselves up, they staggered toward the mouth of the cave. It was all caved in with tons of rock, completely sealing them inside!

"Buried alive!" groaned Randy, sinking to his knees in horror. "We can never dig our way out. It's our tomb now!"

"Well, I warned you it might end this way," said Stone pityingly. "Too bad you're sharing death with me. This trap was planned only for me, not you, kid . . ."

"That's the worst of it!" Randy said, apoloized. "I'm the cause of all this. I insisted on going with you, and then I forced you into this trap. Alone, you would have been too smart to get tricked. I've done everything wrong—everything. Even if I got out of this alive, I'd never make a good sheriff. I'm too dumb."

"Forget it," said Stone. "All we can do now is search for another way out."

They found pieces of wood lying around and lit them as torches, lighting up the darkness. But an hour later, exploring the cave, it came to a dead end of blank rock.

"No other way out," Stone murmured. "Our horses ran out before. We have no food or water."

"We're sunk!" Randy choked. "We'll die here."

Stone shivered. "Cold down here. Well, no sense freezing to death. Let's build a fire."

They warmed themselves over the big blaze. Suddenly, Randy's eyes glowed strangely, with hope. "Sheriff!" he exclaimed. "Why isn't this closed-in space filling up with smoke, choking us? Where does the smoke go? Hey, look! It's going up—up into that narrow crevice above our heads. It must lead to open air!"

Randy was right. Standing on Stone's shoulders, he was able to hoist himself into the crevice, pulling the sheriff up after him. It was a rugged climb upward through the winding crack but at last they crawled free into open air and glorious sunshine.

Neither of them could say a word. They only looked back at what had nearly been their tomb, shuddering.

Their horses were grazing not far off.

A SHORT while later, Owlshead Otis was the most surprised badman in the west when the two figures appeared out of nowhere, sunshooting and capturing him just as he stopped the express stagecoach for robbery.

"Ghosts!" he yelped first, until Randy's hard fist proved otherwise. "How did you darn hombree escape that cave?"

Stone answered smiling, patting the young cowpuncher's shoulder. "Randy here did it. He'll be a good sheriff someday. I'm proud of him. He used his brains and figured out that smoke follows any current of air out of a closed place. Yes, sir, due to Randy's smart thinking, that smoke saved us!"

Sheriff Stone neglected to mention one small thing—that that was the reason he had built the roaring fire in the first place!

THE END

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TO CARRY A FRESH
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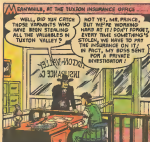
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